

THE ORTHODOX FAITH

VERSUS

NON-ORTHODOXY AND PROTESTANTISM.

OR

Some of the essential elements of the Orthodox Faith of the Syrian Church of Malabar as contrasted with the teachings of Non-orthodox and Protestant Churches and Denominations.

BY

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(The substance of an address delivered at the C. M. meeting held at Trivandrum in 1943.)

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PREFACE

This booklet is the substance of an address delivered at Trivandrum. I am publishing this at the request of several friends, some of whom happened to be in the meeting in which this was delivered. These are days when the youths of the Church very largely take part in inter-denominational conferences and meetings. The young men and women of the Orthodox Syrian Church of Malabar would do well to keep in mind what they stand for as a Church and what contribution they are called upon to make to the wealth of the Christian Community in India. It is to acquaint them with some of those essentials of the Faith once delivered to the Saints and which it is the privilege of the Orthodox Syrian Church of Malabar to preserve up to the present day that this booklet is published. I should wish the members of the Orthodox Syrian Church, especially the student population, to largely make use of this little book and profit by it.

By Non-orthodox Churches is here meant such churches as claim to be episcopal but do not at the same time fully contribute to the Catholic and Apostolic Faith, Doctrines and Practices.

I should acknowledge that in preparing this address I have had first and foremost the help of the Syrian Liturgical books, "Christian Dogma" (മതസംഗ്രഹം) by the Late Mar Geevarghese Dionysius, certain of the Writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch and some of the standard works and booklets published by a few of the eminent Theologians both in the East and in the West, such as Fr. Bulgakoff of the Orthodox Russian Church, Professor Alivistasos of the Greek Church, Dr. Pusey, Bishop Gore, Dr. Darwellstone, Dr. Dumphy of the American Episcopal Church and others. I should say that in some places to express certain truths I have very freely adopted certain words, expressions and even sentences of these authors, for I

thought some of the fundamental truths and beautiful ideas expressed by them could better be brought out in their own language than in mine and any tampering with it would only spoil the beauty and wealth of meaning.

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Bethany Asram,
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THE ORTHODOX FAITH *VERSUS* NON-ORTHODOXY & PROTESTANTISM

Every one who is in touch with the World Movements in Christendom is fully aware of the fact that there is a great longing on the part of various Churches and Denominations to be reunited and become one again. All those who love our Lord can hardly fail to appreciate this spirit and should do all they can to help the cause of reunion of churches. What indeed is the formidable obstacle that stands in the way? There is a good deal of misconception regarding the various theological terms and expressions accepted both by the Orthodox and the Non-orthodox Churches or the Protestant Denominations. The terms such as the Church, the Sacraments, the Priesthood, the Hierarchy etc. do not connote the same meaning to the Orthodox and the Non-orthodox or the Protestants. The Orthodox conception of the

Church, the Sacrament, the Priesthood etc. is so very largely different from that which is held by the Non-orthodox and the Protestants. If there could be perfect agreement in meaning of the theological terms and expressions accepted and employed by the different bodies concerned a good deal of misunderstandings and difficulties could be overcome and the way for the reunion of Churches would become much clearer. What is aimed at in this address is to give you a skeleton of some of the essential elements of the Orthodox Faith of the Syrian Church of Malabar as contrasted with the teachings of Non-orthodoxy and Protestantism.

In a very broad outline I might say that the Orthodox Church differs widely from the Non-orthodox and Protestant churches in the following points:—

1. The conception of the Church.
2. The conception of Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist.

3. The conception of priest-hood.
4. The conception of church administration.
5. The place given to Bible and Holy Traditions in the church.
6. The importance given to worship.
7. The importance given to the communion of Saints and the prayer for the departed.
8. The conception of re-union between Churches.

Each of these points properly dealt with will form a book by itself. I would simply attempt to touch on these points and pass off. Let us take them one by one.

1. The Orthodox conception of the Church

To all the Orthodox and Catholic people
“The Church is a divine Institution or
Society or Brotherhood founded by our
Lord to be the home of grace and truth
which He came to bring to men; so that

becoming His disciple, meant from the first this—In a real sense this only—in-
corporation into His society. 'This being
the case the church is not created by men
nor is it a voluntary association of men
like a debating society or a company
constituted for business purposes. It
cannot be recreated from time to time in
view of varying circumstances. It comes
upon men from above. Hence it makes
the claim of a divine Institution. It has
the authority of Christ. Christ did not,
according to this view, encourage His
disciples to form societies; He instituted a
society for them to belong to as the means
of belonging to Him. This society is a
visible one and incorporation into it or
membership in it achieved through Holy
Baptism is essential for salvation. It is
the home of the new Covenant of salvation
instituted by the Incarnate Son of God.
Outside this home—the catholic church—
no salvation is possible". It is the home
of divine grace and truth. It is the Body

of Christ. It is the Bride of Christ, and the living temple of God. It is not an essentially incidental association of individuals as most of the Protestant and Non-orthodox people hold. The church is God's sphere of action on earth and the abode of the Holy Spirit. In this connection one should like to quote Dr. Dumphy of the American Episcopal church. He says : "The Protestant and Roman theories of the church have this in common, that they habitually view the church as primarily an organisation rather than as an organism. But St. Paul's language demands we approach the church first and always from the organic point of view, not as a society or collection of societies based on the alliance of human wills, but as a living Body, filled with the divine life, having Christ as its head, and the Holy Spirit as its soul. The church is to be one, as the Father and the Son are one, by unity of life, not merely of wills. The undivided Catholic church of

the first nine centuries laid great stress upon it, as has the Eastern Orthodox church ever since, in common with many Anglicans and some Romans. The divine human life of our Lord extended to us through the Sacraments, makes the church one.

“If we may resort to metaphor, Protestantism commonly views the relation of the individual xtian to the church in a way analogous to a stone lying in a heap of other stones, a merely casual and external relation. Romanism is inclined to view it as similar as to the relation of a brick in a brick-wall a more important relation but no less external and life-less than the former. But Catholicism (i. e. Orthodoxy) views it as resembling the relation of a cell or a limb in a living body, to the body as a whole. The stone cast at random into a pile of other stones is not altered in its essence by its relation to them; a brick placed in a wall is not vitally altered or improved by its new

position; but the tiniest bit of matter, taken into a living organism, is vitally changed and transformed by its relation to the organism as a whole. Such, according to historic Catholic doctrine, is the relation of the xtian who has been baptised by the one spirit into the Body of Christ—His union with that Body is not external and casual as in Protestantism, nor external and mechanical, as in Romanism, but internal, organic and vital (as in Orthodoxy)".

The Church is the great family of God, the universal human brotherhood which is to draw all men into unity—a unity centering in God, the only possible centre of unity. Dr. Dumphy echoes the opinion of the Orthodox Churches when he says "The Church, then, is the soul of Christianity. The church is the Body of Christ. To make these two statements may appear bold to the verge of rashness in these days of churchless christianity—a natural enough reaction from a narrow sectarianism—

but they are no more and no less than the truth of God. To say "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church" is to sum up the entire Xtian religion; it is to affirm that article of Christian faith which carries with it all the rest". I should leave the first point here, namely the Orthodox conception of the church, and pass on to the second.

(2) The Orthodox conception of sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist.

Since the day of Pentecost, the day of the creation of the Xtian church, the ordinary way in which God bestowes grace on the souls of men is through the glorified humanity of our Lord and the working of God the Holy Spirit. The closest means of union with the glorified humanity of Christ, and the immediate mode of contact with God the Holy Ghost are in the mystical Body of Xt which is the church. These are achieved through the use of the Holy sacraments which are

seven in number. They are not mere incidental symbols but effective means of grace. The merits of the Incarnate Life of our Lord especially His Passion and work of redemption are applied to our souls through these sacraments appointed and ordained by our Lord for our salvation.

The sacraments are mysteries but they are not magical. "A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, ordained by Christ Himself as a means whereby we receive the same and a pledge to assure us thereof". A sacrament according to the Orthodox or the Catholic teaching is not a bare sign or symbol of grace (as it is in many Protestant systems) but rather an efficacious sign, that is to say, a sign which actually effects or conveys the grace of which it is a sign, provided that the proper conditions are observed. Thus Baptism and confession actually confer remission of sins, if the recipient is duly penitent. The

Holy Qurbana or Eucharist if duly consecrated, and received by a Xtian in a state of grace, is an effectual means of feeding upon Christ. Confirmation or the administration of Holy Muron confers a further strengthening gift of the Holy Spirit to the baptised that he may become a true soldier of Christ. Through the sacrament of Holy Orders or laying on of hands the Holy Spirit is given for the work of ministry. The Sacrament of matrimony enables married Xtians to fulfil—the duties of family life. Holy Unction confers upon the sick and dying graces suitable to their condition, including in many cases actual healing.

The sacraments are scriptural. They are never unspiritual and materialistic in tendency. Neither are they magical charms. They are called mysteries because we do not know how the Holy Spirit works in a sacrament but we know that He works in and through it. To be deprived of sacraments is to be deprived of salvation. In

support of some of my statements above I should like to quote Dr. Dumphy before I leave off this second point. He says:—
“Protestantism in general regards the sacrament as incidental symbol, rather than as a vital reality ministering to the organic life of the Christ Body, and hence treats the question of the priesthood and the Apostolic succession as non-essential. Romanism on the other hand, treats priesthood as practically a caste, set over against the church..... But according to the truly Catholic (i. e. Orthodox) conception the priesthood is simply an organic differentiation within the Body of Christ—the priest acts always for, with and on behalf of the organism as a whole, which is itself a priestly Body”.

Now think of the Orthodox conception of the Holy Eucharist. It holds the central position amongst the sacraments. It is the heart, so to say, of the whole system. It is the continuation of the Sacrifice of our Lord on Calvary and the

representation of His heavenly sacrifice here on earth whereby the faithful associate themselves with the perpetual pleading of our Lord in Heaven. It is the unbloody sacrifice wherein the whole of the Incarnate life of our Lord on earth is commemorated. After the consecration of bread and wine in the Eucharist they are mystically changed into the Body and Blood of our Lord and hence the teaching that our Lord is really and objectively present on the Altar in the Holy Eucharist under the forms of bread and wine after a spiritual and immaterial manner. Those who receive the Holy Communion are really partaking of the Body and Blood of our Lord. The Orthodox deny the transubstantiation theory of the Romanists as well as the Receptionism and the Symbolism theories of the Protestant and the Non-orthodox. These latter deny the sacrificial aspect of the Holy Eucharist and the real presence of our Lord in the same. To them it is only a spiritual act to commemorate

the Death of our Lord and no forgiveness of sins imparted to those who receive the Holy Communion, however worthily. To the Orthodox it is the central act of worship in the church on every Sunday and days of obligation, failure to join in the same being considered as a sin of omission.

3. The Orthodox Conception of Priesthood

The priest is the ambassador of Christ. To the Protestants and the Non-orthodox priesthood is only an office. It does not impress a character on, nor does it convey any charisma to, the recipient of the priesthood. To them the priest is only the paster of souls and is not ordained by our Lord to offer sacrifices for and on behalf of His people. By virtue of his ordination he is given the power and authority to forgive the sins of the people in the Name of God the Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit. But the

Protestants and the Non-orthodox brethren in general deny this authority, (viz) the power of the keys as it is technically called. They may accept the theory of Apostolic sucession but deny the doctrine involved in it, namely the transmission of Ministerial grace through the laying on of hands of the Bishops. The Orthodox never would accept the lay ministeration of any of the sacraments. They cannot conceive of a church Catholic without a validly ordained three fold ministry of Bishops, priests and deacons. Where there is no valid ministry there cannot be any valid sacraments ; which means that in such a church the salvation of souls is jeopardised. Episcopacy is not a matter of mere convenience, or an ornament to the church but the very Esse or core of the church. St. Ignatius has rightly said "Where there is the Bishop there is the Church". In support of these my statements I would like to quote a statement recently published by Canon Frederick Hood, principal of

Pusey House, Oxford. He says "Historically the organ irreplaceable, in all vital acts of the Church, has been the Episcopate. Recent study of the subject tends to show that the Episcopate is in origin not a mere organ of government—which in early ages centered in the presbyterate rather than in the Bishop—but a liturgical ministry. The Bishop is the priest who offers the Eucharistic worship of the Church, because he is pre-eminently the person endowed with the spirit which he confers upon every Xtian at initiation by the gift which we now know as confirmation. As such he is too the ex-officio prophet of the church and therefore her authorised teacher, the supreme doctrinal authority, as the church was to insist in opposition to the Gnostics.

In other words the episcopate in the early church is a specialised and essential organ of the church and, as we have seen, without organs of this kind the church would not be a body but a loose group of

individuals. As Ignatius puts it “Without these (deacons, the bishop and the presbyters) it is not called a church”.

4. The Orthodox Conception of Church Administration.

The church being a divine Institution founded by our Lord its system of administration is Episcopal or Hierarchical. To the Orthodox the synod of bishops is the supreme authority in the church in all matters of Faith, Order and discipline. Instead, the Non-orthodox and Protestant churches vest this authority in a council composed of bishops, priests and laymen where even matters of Faith, Doctrine, Order and discipline are decided by a majority vote.

5. The place given to Bible and Holy Traditions in the Orthodox church.

The Bible is the inspired word of God and as such it is venerated and held in high respect but it never supersedes the church nor is it something instead of the

church, the supreme criterion of truth and all His teaching. Our Lord did not write an all authoritative book in the sense that He founded the church and made it the depository or home of truth and grace. It is not the one only unerring test of the whole truth and Faith as taught by our Lord. The church teaches and the Bible proves. It is the church that determined the canon of the Bible and not vice versa.

The Orthodox lay great emphasis on the Holy Traditions of the church and pay almost equal importance to them as to Bible itself which position of course, is unacceptable to the Protestants and the Non-orthodox. Following these Holy Traditions, the teaching of the Bible, and the example of our Lord and His Apostles the Orthodox insists on the observance of Feasts, Fasts and Saints' days.

6. The importance given to worship in the Orthodox Church.

The only proper worship known to the Orthodox is Liturgical worship. On

Sundays and days of obligation they would not think of substituting any other form of worship instead. All their worship is centred in the Liturgy. The Liturgy commonly used is the Liturgy of S. James, the most ancient Liturgy in the world. A true Catholic, apostolic church is one in which very great emphasis is laid on Liturgieal worship and provision made for the same. The Non-orthodox and the Protestants hold a different view from this.

7. The importance given by the Orthodox to the Communion of saints and the prayer for the departed.

To the Orthodox the church is all inclusive in the sense that it comprises both the living and the dead. That is to say she is composed of all the members of the whole Family whether living or departed. The departed are hidden in the living Body of Christ namely the Church which meets with no destruction and against

which the gates of hell cannot prevail. They are not in a state of sleep after death, only they have passed from one condition of life to another. Our Lord says: "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live". (S. John 11:25.) On this conception the church bases its doctrine of the communion of saints and the prayer for the departed. For the fullness of the Catholic teaching the necessity of accepting these doctrines cannot be overlooked. These doctrines are a stumbling block to the Non-orthodox and Protestants. To illustrate my point I shall quote Dr. Dumphy again. He says: "Protestantism rudely snaps the organic link which binds the faithful departed to ourselves; it neither prays for them nor asks their prayers. "Out of sight, out of mind" is its working principle. Romanism treats the church as a three-story house consisting of the ground floor, the Church militant; the attice, the Church triumphant; and the cellar, the

church suffering or expectant. The church on earth is practically a separate body needing a separate head of its own. Also it makes a sharp and rigid division between those it prays for and those it prays to, between those whom we help and those who help us. True Catholicity (Orthodoxy) prays for and with the whole church, on earth or departed, and asks the prayers of all. Thus Orthodox Easterns not only ask the prayers of the Holy Mother, but also, in their venerable Liturgy, pray for her and all the saints, as members of the one Body of Christ; and similarly an Orthodox boy will pray for his mother at her grave, then kneel and ask her prayers. This surely is the true doctrine of the communion of saints—the fellowship of prayer and life of the one Body in the one Spirit”. In this connection hear also what Canon Frederic Hood, the principal of Pusey House, Oxford—says: “The Church is not merely the church here and now—the church militant—but includes

the church of the past now triumphant in heaven” (Some problems connected with the proposed scheme of Church Union in S. India. P. 15.)

8. The Orthodox Conception of re-union between Churches.

It is our Lord's great prayer and desire that all the churches in Christendom should be one. During the last twenty or thirty years very many Ecumenial Movements have been set on foot with this end in view of which the Lusan Conference of 1927 and the world conference on Faith and Order held in Edinburgh in 1937 head the list. Here in S. India you have the S. I. U. C. also.

Now let me put down in general terms some of the principles and Doctrines which we, the Orthodox, consider very important to preserve in a scheme of re-union of this type. When the Protestants speak of reunion that which is uppermost in their minds is a sort of loose federation

of the uniting bodies. This is entirely contrary to the idea of reunion, based on unity in Faith, unity in Doctrine, unity in Sacraments and unity in Orders. The Orthodox cannot conceive of any reunion except on these four bases. By this they do not mean the absorption of one body by another as the Roman Catholics hold, but of an organic unity with diversity in unity. To the Protestants and to some of the Non-Orthodox churches inter-communion is the basis or the starting point in a scheme of reunion, while to the Orthodox, it is the climax or the final goal of such a scheme. It is only the index of the organic unity and internal harmony which exist among the uniting bodies or churches.

To illustrate the fundamental difficulty that lies in the way of reunion between churches one cannot do better than quoting a portion from the editorial notes of the "Church Times" of June-11-1943. It is as follows: "There are two ultimate

conceptions about the Church's nature. One is that it is a human invention, the constitution of which is decided by local option and expediency. The other is that the Church is a divine institution, owing its origin to Christ, endowed with supernatural gifts, possessing a divinely intended constitution of its own. It is obvious that these two conceptions are mutually exclusive. The church's claim on human allegiance is utterly different according as the one or the other is accepted. If the former conception is held the claim of the church is immeasurably inferior, if the latter, then its adherent will naturally regard his membership or the church as dearer than life itself.....This alternative is of the utmost practical importance. The existence of these two contrary conceptions about the church is one of the most serious obstructions against xtian re-union. How can solid lasting unity be attained between those who regard the church as a mere human association, and

those who are convinced that it is a divine creation..... Those who support the S. India scheme and advocate the interchange of pulpits might consider these questions involved”.